



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

The Only Publication authorized by the Hon. W. F. Cody ("BUFFALO BILL")

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 17.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S DEATH DEAL

OR
THE QUEEN OF GOLD CANYON



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

"CAUGHT AT LAST!" CRIED BUFFALO BILL AS HE FELT HIMSELF AND HORSE CAUGHT IN THE LASSO COILS, AND VAINLY LOOKED ABOUT FOR HIS UNSEEN FOES.

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Buffalo Bill's Death Deal;

OR,

THE QUEEN OF GOLD CANYON.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

TAKING THE CHANCES.

"I will take the risk if it costs me my life!"

The words fell from the lips of William F. Cody, and at a time when he was making frontier history as a "Prince of the Plains," and sending the name of Buffalo Bill from the Atlantic to the Pacific wherever heroism was admired in our American homes.

The cause of Buffalo Bill's utterance of the words that once again would make him take his life in his hands to do a noble act, was in beholding deadly danger to one who had suddenly dashed into view.

That other was a woman.

A woman alone in that wilderness of the far West.

A woman flying for her life at mad speed ahead of a herd of crazed buffaloes.

Frightened to frenzy by a dash of redskins upon them miles away, they had stampeded from the base of a mountain range, across a vast plain, toward the foothills far beyond.

In their path was the woman.

She was well mounted, though her horse went with drooping head as though tired, until over a rise came the thundering herd directly down upon them.

In an instant he was put at his full speed directly for the distant foothills.

But could he reach a place of safety ahead of that wildly seething, bellowing, irresistible avalanche of brute creation, the thunder of whose hoofs fairly shook the plain?

The horse was making the effort of his life.

The woman knew well her danger.

A fearful death awaited her if her straining horse should fall.

She would be trampled out of all human shape.

She was nearing the foothills well ahead of the thundering drove, and she might make them and find shelter.

Then she would have the Indians to fly from, as they would quickly turn from the brute to the human prey almost within grasp.

There were a score of them, well armed, and the picked hunters of their tribe.

The woman was certainly a prize.

Had they seen her ahead of the herd and the dust as she rode?

She had seen them; she knew her double danger.

The herd of maddened brutes would be no more merciless to her than the redskins, she well knew.

Her horse was a fine one and richly equipped.

She was beautiful in face, young and active, a strange creature to be seen in that wild land.

She carried a rifle swung at her back, and revolvers were in her holsters, as well as a saddle roll and haversack, as though she was fitted for a prairie tramp of a day or more.

Her face was a striking one, darkly bronzed, with strangely fascinating eyes, and certainly there was a mystery in her being there.

She was lashing her tired horse fiercely.

She well knew that her situation was desperate in the extreme.

This Buffalo Bill also knew.

He had ridden out upon a spur of the foothills.

He had seen the mad flight of the headlong herd of buffaloes.

Then he had seen the pursuing Indians.

They were gaining upon their brute game.

Then, with a cry of horror, the scout had seen the woman flying for her life.

The frenzied beasts were gaining upon their human game.

The mounted Indians were gaining upon both.

Then Buffalo Bill determined to act.

He took in all the chances at a glance.

He took in the desperation of the woman's position as well.

What he did he did quickly.

Settled well in his saddle, he sent his horse out from the foothills at terrific speed.

Buffalo Bill had taken all risk to save a life or to lose his own.

It was the nature of the man to do so.

Would he be successful?

CHAPTER II.

UNKNOWN.

As Buffalo Bill shot out from the foothills, the woman saw him.

Despair gave place to hope.

She saw the meaning of the brave man's act.

She reeled in her saddle with faintness.

But she quickly regained the calm courage that had sustained her in her wild ride.

The great scout calculated well the distance.

"I can make it," he said, quickly.

"If her horse fails her, mine will do the work," he added.

But he soon saw that her horse was failing her.

She could hardly drive the tired animal on.

He stumbled again and again.

Suddenly he made a bad stumble, recovered himself, and then went down.

But the woman was prepared for it.

She caught on her feet just as Buffalo Bill shouted:

"Run toward me for your life!"

She did so.

The scout's splendid horse made a sudden swoop to the side, the rider leaned from the saddle, and his strong arm grasped her firmly and swung her up before him.

The horse had not halted.

He was off like a deer well ahead of the herd of buffaloes.

Away he flew, gaining in spite of his double load.

The spur of the foothills was reached.

Into a canyon darted the scout.

The woman was dropped to the ground, and without a word to her, the scout wheeled, rifle in hand and rode out on the open to meet his foes.

The herd swept by like a black, heaving, surging sea to disappear into the valley beyond.

Behind came the redskins hot in their track.

They had not seen the woman or the scout.

That was evident, for the dust had hidden them.

But this Buffalo Bill did not know.

The redskins were within range of the spur, and that matchless repeating rifle rose to the shoulder.

Once, twice, thrice it sent forth its death-dealing shots.

Two braves and a pony went down.

Then arose the clear notes of a bugle in wild alarm calling for aid.

Its call echoed among the foothills.

The woman had given that call, for she wore a silver cornet swung to her waist.

Buffalo Bill was startled, but realizing from whence came the notes, he called out:

"Well done!

"The bugle call has set them going!"

But the conduct of the Indians when those deadly shots had come among them had shown their surprise.

It had shown that it was their first knowledge of the presence of the scout.

They had wheeled quickly to dart away in flight.

They now saw the horse and rider.

They knew well that majestic rider, and supposed he must have soldiers near.

The bugle notes of the woman had added to their belief, and they fled in wild dismay along the base of the foothills.

The herd of buffaloes was forgotten.

Life was the game they then sought to win.

The scout made a move to give chase, waving his hat as though calling to others to come on.

The herd had swept on out of sight.

Soon the redskins also disappeared.

Then Buffalo Bill rode down upon the plain and took the badly damaged saddle, bridle and trappings from the dead horse.

His next act was to catch an Indian pony, whose dead rider still held him by the rein.

Upon the animal he fitted the trappings taken from the horse that had fallen under the woman.

Then he rode back to the spur.

There stood the woman, her rifle in hand, awaiting him.

Buffalo Bill was more than amazed at beholding such a woman there, and he raised his sombrero in courteous salute.

She stepped forward and extended her hand while she

said in a voice that trembled, and which was strangely soft and winning:

"I owe you my life, and to me that means a great deal.

"You are Buffalo Bill, the great army scout."

"Yes, but how do you know who I am, miss, as I am sure that we never met before? In fact, I am bewildered at seeing you alone in this land."

She made no reply, and as she did not appear to intend doing so, the scout said:

"Your handsome outfit is a little the worse for wear, but I have all on this pony, which will serve to take you to your home."

"Yes, he will serve me well."

"I will see you safe to your home."

"No, it cannot be.

"I am accustomed to go alone, and I know the way! But you appear to desire to ignore my gratitude to you."

"Do not speak of it, please; but why can I not do as my duty demands and take you to your friends?"

"Because duty demands that I refuse.

"Here our paths divide, though I hope some day we may meet again.

"I can give you no explanation, Mr. Cody, only say that we go separate ways. But there is one favor I wish to ask of you."

"Certainly, in any way that I can serve you, command me," and Buffalo Bill spoke coldly, for he did not wish to be treated by the woman as one she could not trust with the knowledge of who she was and what she was doing there.

"The favor I ask is that you will wear this charm as a good-luck souvenir of our having met; wear it where it can be seen.

"See, I pin it here, sir, for it may save your life.

"More I cannot, will not say—good-by."

She hastily pinned upon his breast a golden badge, leaped into her saddle and said:

"You will not follow me, I know—you must not."

With a wave of her hand, she was gone, leaving the scout standing like one who had received a severe shock.

Soon she disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE TRAILS.

Night was coming on, for the sun was touching the top of the range behind the scout, and soon the prairie would be cast in gloom.

"Well, if that doesn't beat the Dutch?"

"Who is she and what does all this mystery mean?"

"Where is she from, where is she going?" said Buffalo Bill.

"Ah! I had forgotten what she was pleased to call a charm," and the scout glanced down at the pin which she had fastened upon his left breast.

He was fairly startled as he saw it, for he had not especially noticed it before, and a closer inspection showed him its value.

It was a human hand, made of rubies, with a setting of gold, holding in the palm a miniature skull of pearls.

Tiny gold chains suspended this strange device from the pin, which was an owl of diamonds, with large, brilliant eyes of opals.

Looking at this unique, weird and most valuable gift, Buffalo Bill said:

"No, no; I cannot accept this remarkable trinket, charm or whatever she may call it.

"It is some costly thing she must value highly, and gave it to me to show her appreciation of what I did for her, to reward me for her life.

"Come, old horse, I will have to force you to another run, for she shall take this charm back again. Ah, she has disappeared."

He scanned the prairie closely, but could not see her.

He took the field glass that hung at his belt and ran his eyes over the green plain, but nowhere were horse and rider visible; they had disappeared as completely as though swallowed up by the earth.

"There is some break in the plain which she knew of and has taken, to throw me off her track.

"I can do nothing to-night, so will go to the little stream over on the range and camp, and to-morrow see what I can discover.

"Come, old pard, you will be glad of a good night's rest, I know," and, patting his horse affectionately, Buffalo Bill mounted and rode back toward the range, now and then casting a glance behind him, hoping that

he might catch a glimpse of the mysterious woman again.

"She's Mexican, no doubt of that, for she spoke with a slight accent, and she's as pretty as a basket of kittens."

The scout rode at a canter back toward the range. He was anxious to get into camp before it grew wholly dark and he recalled a spot he had seen on a little stream, where he could be most comfortable, with plenty of grass, wood and water at hand.

Buffalo Bill was not forgetful that he was in a perilous country, for the Apaches were to the north, the Comanches south, and the ranches that lay to the eastward and along the trail of wagon trains, stage travel and the cattle-herding lands, caused a lawless element to infest the mountains, from which they would at times pounce upon the traveler, the ranch, stage coach, or attack an emigrant party.

Fort Taos was the check to this lawlessness, as much as was practicable, and a menace to the hostile Indians, as well; but, for all that, the outlaws would strike severe blows from time to time, and the redskins would go upon the warpath to kill and destroy.

It was mainly to put down this lawlessness of Mexican desperadoes, to ferret out their hiding-places and bring them to punishment that Buffalo Bill had been ordered to Fort Taos a few weeks before the opening of this story.

Colonel Hadaway, an old commander in the Northwest, where Buffalo Bill had served as his chief of scouts, had quickly made a demand for him in the new field he had been ordered to when he discovered that the outlaws could not be driven out.

"I want every outlaw in this region killed, captured or hanged, Cody," was his significant announcement. "The task is a big one, the danger is terrible, the work hard, but you can do it, and that is why I sent for you it was for this death deal.

"There is a large gang of them, under a leader known as El Cobra, the Snake. They call him Captain Cobra and the band takes his name, being known as El Cobras

"Every scout is at your command, and if you need the whole garrison, in your work, call on me and they are ready."

Such had been Colonel Hadaway's words to Buffalo

Bill upon his reaching Fort Taos, and the scout had at once begun his work.

With this explanation of Buffalo Bill's presence down in New Mexico, I will follow him on his ride back to the range to go into camp for the night.

He approached the slope just as it was twilight, and allowed his horse to walk.

He turned and glanced back over the prairie, but now all was darkness there.

Continuing on his way, he had ridden about half a mile when, suddenly, on each side of him, and over him, he heard a sound he knew but too well.

It was the whirring of lassoes in their flight.

Quickly he sought to wheel his horse, but was too late, for several coils settled over his head, and as many more over his horse.

"Caught at last!" cried Buffalo Bill, as he felt himself in the toils of the lassoes.

With arms pinioned to his sides, his horse securely caught also in the toils, Buffalo Bill was utterly helpless.

The camp he had sought was just ahead of him, and with no dread of danger he was soon expecting to enjoy a good supper and a night's rest, after the thrilling adventure of the afternoon.

He was passing through a group of bowlders, shaded by trees, when he was caught; it was the very spot for lurking foes to hide in.

His horse had reared, to break away, but, like his master, he at once recognized his helplessness and remained quiet.

Buffalo Bill now saw about him a crowd of men, whose number he quickly counted. There were nine.

They were of small stature, as he could see in the half darkness; they were, apparently, in Mexican costume, and wore large sombreros with stiff brims and peaked tops.

Buffalo Bill did not intend to give the fact away, so asked in English:

"Well, boys, now you've got me, what are you going to do with me?"

"Hang you!" was the quick retort of one who appeared to be the leader, and he spoke with a decided accent.

"That is bad for me, and I do not see that it will do you much good. How have I wronged you?"

"You haf' been Boofala Beel."

"Yes, and I'm Buffalo Bill yet."

"We hang you verra high up."

"If I am to be hanged I don't mind how high you hoist me, but who are you that appoint yourselves my judge and my executioners?" and Buffalo Bill was watching every chance for an escape.

Could he only get one of his revolvers in each hand it would surprise those fellows to see how he could shoot.

"We Mexican—hate Gringos—we El Cobras!"

"Oh! I've heard of you—a pretty bad lot—and from all reports I guess it's all up with me."

"Yes, come now, quick, and be hanged."

"Don't hurry yourselves, for I'm not at all impatient," and the scout was working hard to get his hands upon the hilts of his guns.

But the band had their lariats adjusted now; the horse was in lead, and two of the men quickly unbuckled the scout's belt and disarmed him, taking his rifle from where it hung on his saddle horn also.

But Buffalo Bill still had another revolver, worn in a pocket of his fatigue jacket, so he did not yet despair.

Some of the men had gone on directly to the camp ground where the scout had intended to camp out, and a fire burst into blaze.

Toward this fire the scout's horse was led, and reaching there, he was ordered to dismount.

The three lassoes coiled about his body rendered resistance vain, and he only could obey.

The firelight revealed the horses of the men, staked out near, and toward them his animal was led.

Watching like a hawk every movement of the El Cobras, Buffalo Bill only wanted the slightest chance to make a break for freedom.

The light revealed to him that there was no mistaking who his captors were.

They were Mexicans, and as hard-looking a lot as he had ever seen.

Their dress was a striking and gruesome one, for it represented the skin of a snake, while about their sombreros was coiled a stuffed viper skin.

They were armed with revolver and long knife, a short carbine hanging at their belts, and they had a long lance in imitation of Mexican cavalry, while, in addition, each carried a lariat.

"Now, come, we hang you," said the leader.

"What for?" asked the scout, still trying to gain

time, and having already determined upon his course of action.

It was better to die by bullet than by rope, he thought, and his intention was to whip a revolver from the belt of the leader and with that and his own weapon, to dash right upon them and shoot to kill.

The men talked in a low and rapid tone among themselves, and from what he had before caught of what they had said, he was sure they meant to carry out their threat and hang him.

After an earnest talk with the others, the leader again turned to Buffalo Bill and said:

"We hang you like a dog."

He had placed his hand to uncoil the lariat about the scout's body when, suddenly, his eyes fell upon the good-luck charm on his prisoner's breast as the firelight flashed full upon it.

Instantly he uttered a cry, called his comrades, and all stood gazing full at the strange trinket with amazement in their faces.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHARM.

It did not take Buffalo Bill long to discover that the eyes of the outlaws were riveted upon the pin he wore.

"They'll swear I stole it, I suppose, and kill me to get it.

"But they won't all enjoy it, for now is my time to act," he muttered.

They would, he felt sure, uncoil the lassoes about him to bind his hands behind him, and also to tie his feet, preparatory to hanging him, not supposing that he would resist so many of them.

Confident of this, the scout was preparing to act the moment the last lasso was uncoiled from about his body.

But the work had suddenly stopped when the leader had espied the pin.

They glared at it and at the scout, and spoke a few words rapidly among themselves, which their prisoner could not catch.

Then the leader spoke sternly and asked:

"Where did you get that?"

"It was given to me by a lady I saved from the stampeding herd of buffaloes."

"Who was the lady?"

"I do not know; but I think she was a Mexican, from one of the ranches. She did not give me her name, though I asked her."

"Why did she not fly from the buffaloes?"

"They came over a rise and she had to run before them until her horse fell.

"I saw her danger, rode to her aid, brought her here, and then, pinning this on my breast, she left me. That is all I can tell you."

"Why did she place it there?"

"I suppose to reward me; but I did not notice its value until after she had gone."

"What did she call it?"

"A charm, and said it would protect me, but of course I took no stock in that."

"Can you guide us to where her dead horse lies?"

"Yes, but what is the use?"

"Can you direct two of my men, while you remain here?"

"Of course I can."

"Tell them."

Buffalo Bill gave the desired direction, but suggested, as it was a dark night, it would be best to send four men, so they could stretch out in a longer line.

He had a motive in this, as, if they did not rebind him he knew he could work his arms loose, and then his guards would have a picnic.

But the leader compromised upon three men and took the precaution to more securely bind the prisoner before he divided his forces.

As Buffalo Bill was not yet able to resist, he had to submit.

Then the outlaws set about cooking supper, and the scout was glad to see that it was going to be a good one for he was hungry.

The three men had gone off at a gallop, and there was nothing for him to do but await their return.

An hour later they were back again; the leader was called to one side, and after a few minutes' conversation he approached Buffalo Bill, and said, with considerable respect in his voice and bearing:

"Senor, you are right; you did save a senorita from death, for my men report the horse there, and several dead Indians about it. All must be as you say, and you are free."

Buffalo Bill found it hard to believe what he heard, and, with a sudden impulse, he said:

"Well, I guess it is the charm that saves me."

"Yes, senor, the charm saves you."

"Who is the lady that gave it to me?"

"I do not know, senor."

"Why do you respect it then?"

"My race are superstitious, senor, and when one wears a charm we respect it; we dare not harm him; and for that reason I sent to see if the dead horse was there, to know that all you said was true."

"I have found it to be so; therefore, you are free to go your way, senor, but beware that you strike not at the life of any of the band of El Cobras, or the charm will lose its power."

"I'll chance it," muttered Buffalo Bill to himself, and he also mused:

"That fellow was lying to me, for he does know who gave me the pin, and dares not touch it or harm me."

After talking with his men, the leader asked Buffalo Bill to share their supper, and added that they would then leave him to enjoy his camp alone, as they were going on a night trail.

Buffalo Bill knew that they had arranged to camp there all night after hanging him, but he made no comment upon their change of plans, accepted the invitation to supper, and afterward saw them mount and ride away, each one giving him a respectful salute, and the leader saying:

"Good-by, senor, but remember, let El Cobras alone if you wish to live."

"I'll remember," replied the scout, and he added, as they disappeared in the darkness:

"Now the charm has been put to the test and won. What does it mean? Those fellows know, and it is for me to find out, as I surely will."

Buffalo Bill was watchful in spite of having been set free by the outlaws. One of them might do what the whole band had refused to do; so he placed his horse close in under the shadow of the trees, and, having had his supper, built up the fire and then arranged his saddle, overcoat and trappings to look like a man's form lying down.

Taking another blanket, he went some distance from the fire and lay down to sleep.

If any one came he knew that he would awaken, for

his long training on the frontier in deadly danger had cultivated in him an instinct almost equal to that of a dog to discover a foe.

He soon sank to sleep, and several hours thus passed, when he was aroused by a snort from his horse.

The animal was as good as a watchdog, he well knew, and in an instant was wide awake and on the alert. He realized that some danger threatened or he would never have been warned by his horse.

All was dark about him, but he had piled so much wood upon the fire that it was burning fairly well, and cast a light around for forty or fifty feet.

Under the shadow of a pine near the fire, lay what he had made to represent his sleeping form, and he could see it distinctly.

The horse was in the shadow of the trees, but the scout could hear him walking around his stake rope uneasily.

Some one was about, that was certain; but Buffalo Bill was on his guard, and that meant half the battle.

Suddenly out of the darkness burst a red flame; a sharp report followed, and Buffalo Bill heard the dull thud as the bullet struck the make-believe man lying near the fire.

It had struck in such a way that it must have knocked the bridle in a heap, as there was a movement of the blanket after the bullet had hit.

The horse pulled hard at his stake rope and neighed wildly, but Buffalo Bill did not move from his position. He was biding his time.

Then came another flash and report, this time nearer than from where the first shot had been fired, and there was the same dull thud as before.

The assassin intended to make sure of his victim; there should be no struggle with Buffalo Bill.

A silence followed the second shot, broken only by the frantic efforts of the horse to break away.

The form by the fire naturally lay as still as death, but the scout remained in his hiding-place equally as still.

Suddenly a man dashed out of the shadow of the woods right into the glare of the firelight. He ran across the circle of light, his knife in one hand, revolver in the other, and with a savage Mexican execration, threw himself down upon the supposed form of the scout, his knife giving a vicious blow as he did so.

Then the scout spoke:

"Here I am, Greaser! Up with your hands!"

There was a yell of terror, as the Mexican sprang to his feet, and though not seeing the scout, he pulled trigger at random in the direction from whence had come the voice, while at the same time he bounded for the nearest cover.

But the scout's revolver spoke then, and once only.

It was enough.

The man fell heavily, rolled over, and lay groaning and muttering Mexican prayers.

The scout knew that he had wounded him, but did not know how severely.

He must match cunning with cunning, so he flanked around, and approached him from behind, his revolver in hand.

A word to his horse, a joyous neigh, as the animal saw him, and the intelligent creature was no longer restive.

"Senor, a padre for the love of the Virgin!" cried the man as he heard the voice of the scout.

"Now you've got me, for I could get anything else quicker than a priest for you," said Buffalo Bill, not unkindly.

"You have killed me," groaned the man.

"That is what I shot to do, and I am only sorry it was not sudden death, for it is bad enough to have to take human life without having to see you die."

"Senor, I cannot die without a priest."

"I don't see what I can do to help you. Let me see your wound, and if it is not as severe as you think, I will bear you to an old hunter's cabin, and ride to the Mission, fifty miles from here, for a priest."

"It will do no good; I am going fast," groaned the man.

"Why did you seek to kill me?"

"For that charm you wear. Twice it has saved you. I wanted it, and your life, for I hated you."

"I had done you no harm."

"You wore that; that was enough; and she——"

"Who?"

"No one."

"You know the woman that gave it to me?"

The man was silent.

"You spared my life to-night, when here, with your men, because I wore the charm, and then came back alone to kill me, and get possession of it.

"Tell me—why did you do this?"

There was no reply, and when the scout bent over to look close at the man, he cried:

"He is dead!"

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD BORDERMAN.

Buffalo Bill threw some wood upon the fire, and by its light saw that the man was above his fellows in appearance, having been evidently from the higher walks of life.

He was tall for one of his race, well formed, and had a dark, handsome, but evil face, with long hair, a heavy mustache and imperial.

He was better dressed, too, and the snake about his sombrero had diamond eyes, and a large opal in the center of the head.

Upon the small finger of the left hand the El Cobra wore a large ring, with a blood-red seal, in which was a snake formed of diamonds.

This Buffalo Bill took from the finger, along with a belt of gold which the man wore about his waist.

He also took from him his jacket, leggins, sombrero and weapons, and made them into a bundle.

He had no desire to sleep, and did not know but that still another of the band might return upon the same errand, so he was anxious to get away.

Going in search of the Mexican's horse, he found him a few hundred yards away, standing in the stream, hitched there!

"Ah! He did not wish to be trailed here, so came up the bed of the water course, so I'll not give it away that he met with an accident," decided Buffalo Bill, and he left the horse where he was, but took from the saddle one of the serapes upon it.

Returning to his camp he removed from his traps a hatchet, and, gathering some wood, went over to the stream near by; then, taking off his boots and socks, and rolling up his pants above his knees, he set to work and soon had a dam that carried the stream away from its bed.

Here he began work with his hatchet, and, after a couple of hours' work, had hollowed out a grave in the soft earth.

Into this the body of the Mexican, wrapped in his

serape, was placed; the grave was filled in hard, the dam removed, and the water flowed on as before.

Gliding over the grave, carrying off the loose dirt, the stream soon hid all trace that a human form lay beneath its limpid waters.

This done, Buffalo Bill packed the traps of the dead Mexican, and, taking from his saddle bags a small hammer, nails, a knife, file and some horseshoes, he returned to the stream where the animal still stood.

A fire was built for light, and, leading the horse out of the stream, upon a serape, Buffalo Bill set to work, and in half an hour had shod the animal all round, roughly but well.

Then he hitched him again in the stream, put the Mexican's traps on the saddle, and, going back to his camp, soon had his own horse saddled and bridled.

It was dawn now, and he was glad to see that there was no trace of the tragedy enacted there.

Riding away from the camp, he soon after reached a trail leading down the ridge toward a cabin.

The cabin was situated at the head of a deep canyon, overhung by lofty cliffs, and the spray from a torrent tumbling from the heights above almost reached the door.

There was a rich bit of meadow land below the cabin, and a rude barrier of logs and rocks, serving as a fence, was across the canyon at its narrowest part, forming a corral for his horses.

The cabin, built of stone, was as strong as a fort. It had a window, and a door of logs, split in two, and thick enough to arrest and hold a bullet.

Smoke curling up from the chimney told the scout that the hunter was home, and so he hailed as he entered the barrier and neared the cabin.

At once the man appeared in the door, rifle in hand, and thus stood as Buffalo Bill approached.

As he drew near the scout saw a man of fifty, with long, iron-gray hair and beard, buckskin leggins, shirt and moccasins, a squirrel-skin cap, belt of arms and a rifle.

The face was the hue of leather, and the eyes deep set, very bright and piercing.

He did not speak, but waited for the scout to do so, still standing upon his guard.

"Good-morning, sir," saluted Buffalo Bill, politely, while he eyed him with curiosity.

"Mornin', pard!"

"I called on you to ask if you can tell me who a woman is who rides about this country alone?"

"Don't know."

Buffalo Bill looked at the old man in a way which very plainly showed he believed the hunter was lying in saying that he did not know who the strange woman was, but he played off.

"You say you do not know who she was?"

"Don't know."

"Why, she told me she knew you."

"Everybody knows Panther Pete."

"That is your name?"

"Yes."

"You live here all alone?"

"Yes."

"What do you do?"

"Kill panthers, mostly."

"And hunt?"

"Yes."

"For Indians and outlaws?"

"If they hunt me."

"You sell panther skins and pelts?"

"Yes; trap for pelts and sell them; get big money for panther skins with head and claws on."

"Do the Comanches never bother you?"

"Sometimes."

"What do you do then?"

The hunter did not reply by words, but pointed silently to a little spot on the banks of the stream, where the scout counted no fewer than seven graves.

"Ah! You kill, scalp and bury your dead?"

"Yes."

"Do you see the outlaws often?"

"Sometimes."

"And they do not disturb you?"

"Twice; I see and get the drop on them first."

"You have lived here for some time?"

"Ten years."

"Do you ever go over among the ranches?"

"Only to the store to sell my pelts and get my supplies."

"Then you know some of the ranch people?"

"No."

"Not even the Mexican lady?"

"No."

"How does she know you, then?"

"Everybody knows me."

Buffalo Bill smiled.

He had gotten back to the same answer again.

But he tried again.

"You have seen the lady?"

"Several times. Seen her riding in the mountains."

"Alone?"

"Sometimes."

"Who was with her when she was not alone?"

"Other people."

"Did you ever see this before?" and the scout pointed to the charm.

"No."

"It was given to me by that lady in blue for saving her life. Do you ever go to the fort?"

"No."

"Does no one know you there?"

"Everybody knows Panther Pete."

The scout bit his lips to hide a smile, and muttered to himself:

"And Panther Pete is a sly old coyote."

But aloud he said:

"Do you know anybody at the fort?"

"Have seen them—that's all."

"Well, pard, I expect to be scouting around this country now and then, and may see you often, so we must be good friends."

"Yes."

"I camped on the range last night, and a band of outlaws captured me, but let me go when they saw this badge I wear."

The old hunter made no reply, and Buffalo Bill said:

"Do you know those outlaws? El Cobras, as they call themselves."

"Yes; bad men."

"Do you know their haunts?"

"No."

"Did you ever see their chief?"

"Yes; seen him go by when he did not see me."

"Describe him."

"Small man, dresses fine, and in Mexican lancer's uniform."

"That was not the man I killed," muttered Buffalo Bill. "Doubtless one of his officers," and he asked the hunter:

"Well, pard, is it not about breakfast time?"

"Guess so, come in."

Buffalo Bill concluded this to be about as cordial an invitation as he could get, so he dismounted, took the bridle off his horse and turned it loose to feed, while he said:

"I have coffee, bacon, crackers and some other things with me, if you wish any?"

"Got plenty."

This Panther Pete proved by setting a good breakfast before the scout, who had to use his own plate, cup, knife and fork, for the hunter had only his own.

The cabin was a comfortable one; there was one bed in it, one chair, table, and a number of old books; also a violin, cornet and any number of rifles, revolvers and traps for catching fur animals.

Buffalo Bill studied the man closely, questioned him as skillfully as a lawyer, but after a couple of hours, left him without having made any discovery regarding him more than that he lived alone, sold pelts and "everybody knew Panther Pete."

"Everybody knows more than I do," muttered the scout, as he rode away from the cabin.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORM.

Buffalo Bill had told the hunter he was going to Fort Taos, that he had left a pack horse over in the hills, and would pick it up on the way.

He had waited about ten minutes, when he saw the old fellow come out of the canyon, following his trail.

Keeping on it for a quarter of a mile, he came to where there were three trails, one turning southward, the other keeping straight on, the third branching away to the northwest toward Fort Taos.

It was this one the scout had taken.

Apparently satisfied that Buffalo Bill had told him the truth, Panther Pete retraced his way and disappeared in his canyon.

Then the scout went after his horse, mounted and rode on to the top of the range, and, when there, glanced out over the prairie.

With his glass from that height he could see a break in the prairie beyond, where he had parted with the

woman the night before. This break, he discovered, ran along toward the north for nearly a mile.

That explained the mysterious disappearance of the lady in blue. She had turned into the divide and followed it up until hidden by the approach of night.

"She knew it was there, and thus threw me off. Well, I'll know who she is yet."

Thus deciding, he rode on toward his camp of the night before, turned into the bed of the stream there, at the spot where he had buried the outlaw, and of which burial there was not a trace visible.

Riding down the stream a quarter of a mile, he found the outlaw's horse awaiting, but not patiently. He was still in the stream, tied by the lasso upon either side.

Unfastening him, Buffalo Bill rode on in the water for half a mile; then he turned out just where the rocky shore would not reveal the slightest trace of a hoof track.

This hard soil continued for quite a little distance, when the scout struck into a trail running to the northward, which he followed, gradually working around to the right, so that he could cross the trail of the lady in blue, as he called her, where she must have come out of the divide.

The truth was, Buffalo Bill was determined to track the woman to her home, giving as an excuse that he desired to return to her the valuable charm, the intrinsic worth of which he had not noticed until after her departure, and also to tell her that it had done good service in saving him from the outlaws.

He could not rid himself of the belief that the outlaws knew who the woman was, for the dying outlaw officer had as good as admitted it.

As for Panther Pete, Buffalo Bill looked upon him as a very mysterious personage, cunning, clever, brave and a thorough plainsman.

He had not compromised himself by a single reply to all the scout's close questioning, and had appeared much too simple to please his astute questioner. He might be innocent, but Buffalo Bill felt sure that he knew who the lady in blue was and all about her.

That he might know more about the outlaws than he had admitted, the scout thought possible, also.

Altogether, Panther Pete, to his mind, would bear watching.

"I started out from the fort without being well

enough posted. They told me that the outlaws were known as El Cobras, were generally Mexicans, half-breeds or fugitive Americans, and had their haunts somewhere in these mountains, while I was also to keep an eye upon the Comanches.

"The colonel gave me good maps, but I was not told that I was liable to meet a beautiful woman, dressed in blue, alone in the wilderness, run upon a lone hunter and strike a band of outlaws who would spare me because I wore a charm.

"I must return to the fort and get better posted, and then I will see my way clear. But, now to find the trail of the lady in blue."

Halting at noon, in his wide flank movement, Buffalo Bill continued on in his search and later came upon a trail leading across the prairie.

It was of a single horse, coming from toward the head of the divide, and after examining it closely for some time, he said, decidedly:

"I have found it."

The trail led from the head of the divide on the prairie, just where the woman in blue had disappeared the night before so mysteriously, and headed for the range to the northward.

It was by this range that Buffalo Bill had circled around the prairie.

Buffalo Bill had marked well the tracks of the horse, and was convinced that there was no mistake, and at once set out upon the trail.

But he had not gone very far before he felt a change in the air. It was early spring, and he looked for bad weather, for the winter was not yet fully broken.

He was too good a plainsman to neglect the warning, when he felt the atmosphere drop in less than an hour some ten degrees.

Night was at hand, and he at once felt that his wisest course would be to seek shelter.

He rode on rapidly, watching right and left, as he went, and was glad to see, at last, a sheltered nook among the hills.

And the horses were glad, too, for their instinct told them what to expect.

There was a little canyon, in the head of which was a copious spring, while the grass grew luxuriantly on each side of the tiny stream flowing from it.

This canyon was thick with an underwood of pines, a

regular thicket at its head, while heavy timber was just below.

The scout worked with lightning rapidity now, for he well understood that there was no time to lose.

The horses were run into the most dense part of the thicket and there tied securely, the saddles and traps being dragged under the shelter of a bank right by them, and which would act as a wind-break.

Then the scout's hatchet was wielded with a will, and in a few minutes he had a lot of pine boughs cut with which he made a wickiup that would shelter him completely from the bitter-cold blasts.

Wood was gathered further down the canyon, several great armfuls being carried, while logs were dragged up with a lariat and his horse, and a large fire was kindled.

The horses were blanketed, boughs were cut to make a more thorough shelter for them; his own bed was spread in the cozy retreat, and supper was put on.

The darkness now had become intense, though the sun had not yet set.

"It's a norther, and will be a terrible one, too, or I am greatly mistaken. I might have perished if I had not found this snug retreat," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he ate his supper hastily, to be all prepared for the storm when it should strike.

Then he looked again to the horses, tied their blankets closer, arranged some boughs as a wind-breaker, threw another heavy log on the fire, and crept into his shelter.

Hardly had he lighted his pipe and made himself comfortable, when there was a roar, the pines bowed to the piercing blast, the darkness was intense, and the cold became terrible to endure, the two horses at once lying down to keep warm in the pine straw, while they seemed glad of the heat of the fire blown over them.

Crashes down the canyon told how the heavy timber was being twisted and shattered by the fierce hurricane, and Buffalo Bill well knew that but for the sheltered nook he had found, his fire would have been scattered, his wickiup torn down, and the intense cold would have made both his horses and himself suffer greatly.

After the mad rush of the first fierce blow of the hurricane, the sleet began to drive along with lightning speed, and again the scout congratulated himself as he lay snugly in his retreat.

The fire roared under the pressure, but it was so well

protected that it did not blow away as the scout had feared it would.

Feeling that it had set in for a night of storm, with another look at his horses showing that they were comfortable, he returned to his blankets, chilled through by only a few minutes of exposure.

But he felt the heat of the fire, and soon got comfortable again, and was sinking into sleep, with no dread of danger from other than the storm on such a night, when suddenly he was startled by beholding the shadowy form of a horse and rider.

Was he asleep and dreaming?

A loud neigh convinced him to the contrary, so he sprang from his blankets, drew on his boots and overcoat, and was quickly at the side of the horseman.

He discovered that the man could not speak, he was so nearly frozen, and, pulling him quickly from his saddle, he drew off his heavy outer coat and boots, and thrust him into his warm blankets which he had just vacated.

Then he took from his saddle pouch a flask of brandy, and pouring a generous drink into his tin cup, he forced it between the lips of the stranger, who seemed nearer dead than alive.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCOUT'S VISITOR.

Buffalo Bill stripped the horse of his saddle and bridle, led him to the spot where the other two were, and quickly sheltered him under the saddle blanket and another he had to spare, cutting pine boughs and piling them around and over him, for the intelligent animal had quickly laid down as the others had, and seemed to feel that all was being done for his comfort.

Then Buffalo Bill, suffering himself from the intense cold, returned and threw another log on the fire, and, sitting down by the side of the stranger, felt his hands and feet.

They were already growing warmer, and another drink of brandy was given the man, who this time seemed to be more conscious of his position.

Heating the Mexican's serape, Buffalo Bill folded it close around him, and then drew out of the coals a large stone which he had thrown there.

This he wrapped in the serape, and pushed it under

the blankets to the feet of the stranger, when, feeling that he must protect himself also, he drew off his boots and also got into the snug bed, feeling that his own warmth would help to restore that of the half-frozen man.

For an hour the scout lay thus, and had gotten warm himself and was glad to feel that his patient was also thawing out.

"How do you feel now, pard?" he ventured, for the man had not spoken.

"I am warm, now, but numb. It was a close call, but you saved my life. I would have died in a few minutes more. My horse's instinct led him here."

So the man replied in broken sentences, and Buffalo Bill said:

"You are all right now, but give this flask another pull and then go to sleep."

"Thank you," and the man took a swallow of the brandy and said:

"I never saw such a storm—never felt such cold."

"It is a terror; but go to sleep now, and I'll have a cup of coffee for you in the morning, so you will be all right."

"Is my poor horse frozen?" he asked, feelingly.

"No, indeed! He is lying over there with mine, blanketed and covered with pine boughs."

"You have a noble nature to think of him in such a storm—a very noble nature. Now I will go to sleep, as you command."

In a few minutes more the stranger was sleeping peacefully, and Buffalo Bill soon followed his example.

Thus the night passed, with snow, driving sleet and rain, as the fierce winds changed their humor; but secure in their retreat, both men and horses slept undisturbed until the dawn came, when, as suddenly as it had come on, the terrible norther blew over, and all was peace again in the great trees.

Buffalo Bill arose quietly, threw more wood upon the fire, then unblanketed the horses, who had not moved, led them to water and staked them out to feed on the rich grass, none of them the worse off for the night of storm.

As the sun rose the air became balmy, and the day promised to be really mild and pleasant.

Getting out his bag of supplies, Cody cooked a good

breakfast, and only when it was nearly ready he called his guest.

He had noted that the stranger rode a very fine horse, that his saddle was a Texas tree, studded with silver, and of the very best make, while his serapes were of silk and wool.

His hat was a slouch of fine texture, and his boots handsome ones and with silver spurs.

"Some ranchero who got astray," was the comment of the scout, regarding his guest, and then he called him.

The stranger aroused himself with a seeming effort, but, realizing at last where he was, he arose quickly and said:

"Ah! I remember now. You saved my life, sir!" and he gazed with considerable interest upon Buffalo Bill.

"Your horse did, sir, for he brought you to my lone camp, and fortunately I had prepared for the storm, seeing it coming on."

"I did not, for I was in the timber, and did not realize its coming until I was caught. I had not a match; to cross the prairie to the settlement was madness, and before I was aware of it I was freezing to death.

"I can never forget your kindness, sir, never!" and he extended his hand, which Buffalo Bill grasped.

He saw before him a fine-appearing personage, with dark face, black hair and eyes, and the look of a Mexican, though he spoke English without the slightest accent.

He was a handsome, courtly man, yet with the look of one who had led a wild life, and was dressed in style that was considered "sporty" on the border.

"I am Tom Travis, sir, a ranchero, and as there was a stampede of cattle from the ranches, I rode out to help round them up, but got separated from the others.

"To whom, may I ask, do I owe the debt I cannot repay, of my life?"

"I am a scout at Fort Taos, sir. My comrades call me Buffalo Bill, but my name is William Cody," was the scout's modest reply.

"Had you only said William Cody, I might not have known you; but as Buffalo Bill I know you well by reputation, and you look just the man to win the name you have. I hope we will be good friends, Mr. Cody."

"I see no reason why we should not, sir; but break-

fast is ready, or will be by the time you have made your toilet," and Buffalo Bill handed the stranger a towel, soap and comb.

He quickly walked to the stream and soon returned, feeling much refreshed.

"It was kind of you to care for me so well and allow me to sleep until the last moment, while you also took good care of my horse, I see."

"My horse is my pard, sir, and I could never neglect a dumb brute. The other animal you see is one I found with saddle and bridle on, and as he has no owner, I appropriated him."

"Yes, finding is keeping out here," replied Tom Travis, whom Buffalo Bill had seen particularly regarding the outlaw's horse, and hence had spoken, for he did not know but that the man he had killed might have stolen him from the settlement, and his guest have recognized him.

Complimenting the scout upon his very good breakfast, Travis, who seemed to regard him with increased interest, said:

"May I ask if that costly trinket is a badge given for services you have rendered?"

"I may say yes, and no, to that, for I got it for a service rendered, and not, as you doubtless surmise, from the army."

Travis looked at the fire with added interest and replied:

"I supposed it was an army decoration for gallant services."

"No, sir, it is not, and I got it only yesterday. I saw from a range some thirty miles from here, a lady in danger, for she was horseback out on the prairie, and in the path of a maddened herd of buffaloes. I went to her rescue and was fortunate enough to save her.

"Her name, or who she was, I do not know, but when she parted with me she pinned this beautiful and costly trinket on my breast, calling it a charm. Until she left me I did not realize its value, and then I decided to follow her, but she had disappeared. I went into camp on the range, was lassoed by a band of nine outlaws, who were going to hang me, but saw this charm and set me free.

"To-day I intended tracking the fair stranger to her home and return the badge, but the storm has destroyed the trail of her horse and I must give it up. But I'll

describe her, and perhaps you, sir, can tell me who the lady is."

With rapt attention the stranger had listened to the story, and when Buffalo Bill had described the fair donor of the gift to him, he said, thoughtfully:

"I cannot conceive who she can be. Such a woman as you describe does not certainly belong over in the settlements, for I know all there are at the ranches.

"The woman is as much a mystery to me, Mr. Cody, as to you, and now that the storm has washed out the trail, I fear you will never find her."

"Perhaps not, sir, but when I do I will return this costly gift."

"And lose your charm?"

"I am not superstitious enough to believe in its virtues."

"And yet confess that it saved you from the El Cobras."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, for there came to him the thought of his having also escaped death at his lone camp.

"It is a beautiful thing, and I advise you to keep it. Yes, do not give your charm away, my friend. It may be the harbinger of more good than you dream."

"Just now I cannot do as I proposed because I am unable to find the lady who gave it to me; but this charm certainly must be worth a great deal of money, and to keep it seems to me as though I was accepting a reward for my services."

"I do not so regard it, and would say accept it; yes, test its virtues again, and see if it is not a veritable talisman—a real charm. But do you go toward the settlement, Mr. Cody?"

"No, to Fort Taos, now."

"Then our trails divide, for which I am sorry. I must proceed to the settlement.

"Travis is my name, as I told you. Don't forget it for I hope to see you at my home, some day, as I would like to prove my appreciation of your service to me."

"It was no more than any one would have done, sir."

Buffalo Bill led up the three horses, the rancher saddling his own animal, and mounting in a way that showed the thorough horseman.

Then the two men, so strangely met, shook hands warmly and parted, one riding toward the prairie, the other in the direction of the stockade fort.

"I may be wrong, but it seems as though I had seen that man before," mused the scout, as he rode on his way.

CHAPTER VIII.

RETRIBUTION.

Buffalo Bill ascended a range of hills and halted his horse upon the summit.

"There is no hurry, and I would be late in the night getting in, so I will camp on the river to-night. But what's that? There comes a horseman," and he turned his glass upon the one that had caught his eye. "Yes, it is a soldier, and he is riding very rapidly; a courier, doubtless, bearing important dispatches."

So saying, Buffalo Bill threw himself upon the grass, allowing his horse to wander and feed at will, and thus awaited the coming of the horseman.

The trail would bring him within fifty feet of him, and the scout was anxious to know if anything had gone wrong at the fort.

The manner in which the soldier rode indicated that he was upon an important mission, and at the speed he was forcing his horse, Buffalo Bill knew that the animal must be well used up, as it was thirty miles to the fort!

"I will give him the outlaw's horse, for he is comparatively fresh," said he.

Still watching the rider, he saw him reach the hill and there draw his tired horse to a walk.

He turned in his saddle and kept constantly looking behind him, as though he was enjoying the scenery as he mounted higher and higher.

"One would think he was pursued," muttered the scout, and just then the soldier halted, turned his horse and looked back over his way for several minutes.

Then he dismounted and, holding the rein of his bridle in hand, began to walk up the hill, evidently to spare his tired horse.

He had got within several hundred yards of where the scout lay upon the ground, shielded by the ridge and some pines from view, when suddenly there burst forth from behind a rock a puff of white smoke, a report followed, and the soldier fell in his tracks, shot from an ambush.

A wild, hoarse yell followed, and two Indians

sprang into view, from behind a rock, and ran toward the fallen soldier.

Buffalo Bill recognized their intention in an instant; it was to scalp their victim.

One of the Indians wore the full war bonnet of a Comanche chief, and the other was a warrior.

The chief held a rifle in his hand as he ran, the warrior carried a lance and bow and arrows.

In an instant Buffalo Bill had called his horse to his side, was in his saddle and dashing down the slope.

He did not count odds in going to the rescue, for he could see that the soldier was still alive, and had half raised himself in a position of defense, while he held a revolver in his hand.

Giving his own thrilling warcry, to let the Indians know of his presence, and to frighten them away from their purpose, Buffalo Bill dashed swiftly to the rescue.

The scout's warcry startled the two Comanches, and they halted and turned quickly.

But they saw only one horseman, and the chief turned to meet him, hastily reloading his rifle as he did so, and giving an order to the brave, who bounded on toward the wounded soldier.

Seeing that the chief would face him alone, Buffalo Bill drew rein, leaped from his saddle and advanced on foot toward the Comanche, who was making for the cover of some rocks.

Once there he would have a great advantage, Buffalo Bill knew, and so he quickly risked a shot!

The Indian fell, but was up on the instant, and started to hop on toward the rocks, for one foot had been rendered useless by the scout's shot.

Rapidly Buffalo Bill ran to head him off, and suddenly dropped, just as the chief fired.

The bullet did not miss him an inch, and again his rifle flashed and the Comanche dropped dead.

Without a glance at him the scout ran on toward the spot where the soldier lay, again wounded, for an arrow was sticking in his shoulder, and the Comanche had sought cover, as the revolver of the white man had proved dangerous.

Seeing his chief fall, the warrior became desperate, as he beheld Buffalo Bill rushing upon him, and he darted upon the soldier to kill him, and get possession of his firearms, and fired his arrows as he ran.

But the wounded soldier pulled trigger rapidly, and

as he saw the warrior go down under his fire, he dropped back as though he, too, was fatally hurt.

Another moment and Buffalo Bill reached the spot.

"Well, pard, retribution came quick on those fellows, but let me see how badly you are hurt," and Buffalo Bill knelt by the side of the wounded soldier, who said, in a low tone:

"And retribution followed quickly to me—it was a double retribution. I am dying, Buffalo Bill, for I recognize you as the new scout from the Northwest."

"I hope you are not badly wounded, pard. Let me see."

"Yes, but it will do no good, for the rifle bullet did the work, the arrow wounds are nothing."

Buffalo Bill drew the arrows from the wounds, one in the shoulder, the other in the hip, and then opening the uniform jacket and shirt, looked at the bullet wound.

It was in the chest, and Buffalo Bill's experienced glance told him that the bullet had entered the lung and the result would be fatal.

"I told you so—it will kill me. Tell me the truth," said the soldier, not waiting for the scout to speak.

"You are a soldier and a brave man, so I will tell you the truth. The wound is fatal."

"I knew it, but I am not a brave man, for I am a coward and a deserter. Last night I killed a fellow soldier, the orderly sergeant of my troop, and I thought I had covered my tracks up well, but I feared I was suspected, and I fled soon after.

"I suppose I am pursued, but what matters it now, for I will be beyond punishment. I will tell you why I killed him. It was for the accursed love of gold. I entered the army only to kill him. He did not know me, but I knew him, and he stood between me and a fortune.

"With him out of the way it would be left to me, and so I devoted my life to removing him from my path. I entered the army under an assumed name, joined his troop and plotted for one aim. I accomplished it, and retribution has come quickly. But they won't hang a dying man, will they?"

"No, and you are a dying man. Have you anything more to say, anything you would wish me to do for you?"

"Yes. I have with me papers that tell who I am, what I have been. If the sergeant had any heirs, let them

get the benefit of his fortune, for he did not know of what was to be his.

"It was all the work of a wicked lawyer and myself. He tempted me by telling me I would be rich but for a man who was in my way.

"He told me who the man was, that no one but him knew where to find him, that I could get him put out of the way, and we would share the fortune together. His name is there with those papers; he brought me to this, so let him suffer as he deserves; his own letters will condemn him."

The scout, impressed by the soldier's confession, told him he would place all in the hands of the colonel at the fort.

Then he explained that his horse was loose, the soldier's horse was straying away, he had another animal upon the ridge, and where there was a chief and a brave alone together, that there must be others near.

He made the soldier as comfortable as he could and at once went after his horse, which came at his call.

The soldier's was next caught, and then the outlaw pony upon the ridge.

As he returned Buffalo Bill paused by the side of the Comanche he had slain, and saw that he was a full chief, for his costume so indicated.

Returning to the soldier, he found him still alive, but sinking fast, and sitting down beside him he did all in his power to soothe the dying moments.

Only in the faintest tone could the man speak now; his face had assumed the pallor of death, his lips were set, and with a pleading look upon the scout, a silent appeal for help, he breathed his last, the hand of Buffalo Bill clasping his until he felt the grip release.

"Poor fellow! His retribution did come quick indeed. Well, I've got a task upon my hands, of caring for three dead bodies, for I will take all to the fort.

"But first to find those redskins' horses," and Buffalo Bill mounted his horse and went out on his search.

He knew that the Indians were not on foot, for without his horse a Comanche is next to worthless.

They had evidently seen the soldier coming a long way off, hidden their horses, and had gone into ambush near the trail.

Taking in the nature of the surroundings, Buffalo Bill picked out about where he thought the ponies had been left and rode there.

CHAPTER IX.

AN OPEN GRAVE.

Buffalo Bill found the two ponies of the Indians hitched among the pines.

They were good animals, but looked to have been hard ridden, their riders having been separated, doubtless, from a prowling band of warriors, and were making for their retreat when they discovered the soldier.

Taking the horses in lead, he returned to the spot where he had left the soldier.

Enveloped in his blanket, he placed him upon his saddle and strapped him there securely.

The Indians were then tied upon the backs of their ponies, and, mounting, with four animals now in lead, Buffalo Bill set off for the river, where he intended to camp for the night.

He reached there before sunset, and went into camp on the river bank, at a spot where the timber was scattering, but the grass good.

Just where he halted he was surprised to see an open grave. It was well dug, deep and empty!

It had been recently dug, too, for the earth was fresh and the place was well chosen for the last resting-place of some poor unfortunate who had not yet been laid to rest there.

It was on a slight rise just on the river bank, and commanding a view for a long distance around, while it was several hundred yards off the trail, and where it crossed the stream, which was fordable at points far apart.

The open grave, grim as it looked, did not drive Buffalo Bill to seek a camp elsewhere, for he determined to halt just there.

Unsaddling his horses, he staked them out, gathered some wood for a fire, placed the body of the dead soldier on one side, the Indians near it, and while the fire was getting headway, he spread his blankets for the night.

Then he cooked and ate his supper, smoked his pipe, and quietly pondered over that open grave, the firelight revealing it distinctly.

But he could not account for its presence there, and unoccupied, so gave it up, and turned in, determined to make an early start in the morning, but first to give the brave Indians the benefit of the grave he had found.

Rising early, he had his breakfast, and was preparing

to carry out his plan of burying the Indians, and not carrying them further, when his horse gave a low neigh, which the scout well knew was one of alarm.

Instantly he was on the alert, and in the dim light of early morning he beheld a band of Indians coming down the river bank.

There were a dozen of them, at least, and of course they had seen his fire and were coming to investigate.

He was about to mount quickly, for his horse was saddled, leave the dead redskins, and with the body of the soldier, push for the ford, when to his surprise, he beheld a second body of Indians coming up the river bank toward him.

He still thought of dashing out on the plain, trusting in the speed of his horse, and being compelled to leave the soldier's body and the animals, when a third party of mounted warriors were visible, heading him off in that direction.

A grim smile crossed his face, as he prepared to stand at bay, and he muttered:

"The grave comes in handy."

Then he took in the situation for and against him.

There were three bands of warriors, and he was cut off from escape.

To take to the river would be to go down with the current and be killed by the redskins on the bank.

But suddenly a thought flashed through his mind.

"You can go." And he spoke to his horse.

In an instant he had written on a slip of paper with a pencil these words:

"Am corralled near ford—about forty Comanches.

"B. B."

Tying this with a buckskin string about the neck of his horse, he led the animal to the bank, forced him in and said:

"Go to the fort, sir!"

The intelligent animal seemed to know just what was expected of him, and ran rapidly down-stream toward the ford, while the scout played the ruse of trying to catch him, not to let the redskins suspect that he was a dumb courier with an appeal for aid.

Then Buffalo Bill began action for defense.

The Indians had all halted beyond rifle range.

The number of horses seen made them cautious, fearing many riders.

But Buffalo Bill lost no time in preparing for deadly work, and the place of refuge he sought was the empty grave.

Down into the grave leaped Buffalo Bill, having led the two Indian ponies, the outlaw's horse, and the one ridden by the soldier close up around it, saddled and bridled as they were.

The three dead bodies were first placed upon the two sides and one end of the grave, and a log on the end toward the river.

This brought the scout's head just over the breastwork of earth and dead humanity.

He saw the Indians were yelling at his horse, trying to turn him back, and two braves rode hard for the ford to try and head him off.

It was an anxious moment for Buffalo Bill, and he gave a shout of delight as he saw his noble horse ahead of the braves.

They had thrown their lassoes, but missed, and, wheeling to the right, he had dashed up the bank and was off like a shot for the fort, the redskins little dreaming of the message he bore.

The two braves crossed the river, hoping he would halt there, and they would catch him.

But Buffalo Bill knew their hopes were vain, and paid no more attention to them.

In fact, he had to look out for himself just then.

The Indians had approached near enough to see that there were two horses and two ponies in the little clump of timber about the grave.

If that meant four riders, they were not able to see them. They had seen but one.

Then they gave vent to a series of wild yells, and grew very excited.

Buffalo Bill knew just what this meant, for he muttered:

"They have recognized the two ponies."

Shouting to each other, each band began to string out now, and they advanced until the semi-circle was complete, each end resting upon the river.

Then they began to slowly advance toward the scout.

He knew what it meant—that they intended to charge in upon him.

So he said:

"I am sorry, poor fellows, but it's self-preservation, you must die to make me more secure."

He sprang out of the grave as he spoke, and in an instant his knife had sunk deep into the neck of the soldier's horse.

The animal fell dead in his tracks, and with an effort of his great strength Buffalo Bill had dragged him alongside of the grave. The outlaw's horse came next, and then one of the Indian ponies, the other breaking away before he could be sacrificed.

The Indians were advancing slowly, but were not yet within range of the scout's splendid repeating rifle.

They halted at the dashing away of the Indian pony, and did not seem to at first realize just what was happening.

Then it burst upon them, and, with wild yells, they came forward.

They seemed to know now that they had but one man to deal with, two at least, and not seeing the grave, they supposed the horses were the only breastwork for him to fight behind.

Buffalo Bill had glanced along the line, and quickly picked out the braves who carried firearms.

They were not more than eight or ten in number, he was glad to see.

But all were armed with lances, bows and arrows.

"This empty grave is the very spot to fight from," said Buffalo Bill, as he had arranged the bodies of men and horses to his liking, cast a glance far across the plain to where his noble steed had disappeared, and the two Indians were returning from their useless errand and then brought his rifle ready for use.

Before him, upon the edge of the grave, laid the dead soldier's rifle, also a repeater, and his belt of arms, along with his own ready for quick use.

The ammunition was there also, and standing up in the grave, Buffalo Bill felt that he could make a desperate fight of it.

"If I go under there will be wailing in the Comanchero camp," he said, sternly, and, concluding that it was time to give the redskins a sample of what they had expect if they crowded him, he drew a bead upon the chief, as his war bonnet showed him to be.

He was about the center of the semi-circle, and the furthest off of all.

But, with the report of the rifle, he went back away off of his spotted pony.

Then followed rapidly, shot after shot, first aim

here, then there, and with as deliberate aim as possible under the circumstances.

Braves rolled out of their saddles, killed or wounded, ponies went down, and, as the empty rifle of the scout was thrown aside and the soldier's weapon seized and began to rattle, the redskins began to recoil when almost upon their prey.

The recoil meant quick retreat, and they sought safety by getting out of range as quickly as possible.

Stern-faced, with lips set, eyes burning with the fire of battle, Buffalo Bill stood at bay in the open grave, an arrow in his shoulder, a second one in his arm, and two more having pierced his broad sombrero.

CHAPTER X.

THE PURSUIT.

With the Taos Mountain to the north, the Sacramento Mountains to the south, the Rio Grande River on the one hand, and the Rio Pecos on the other, surrounded by fertile plains, and in a country where men had the gold fever, others were cattle and ranch owners. The Indians were generally in an ugly humor toward the whites, and there were outlaws haunting the trails to rob the coaches and wagon trains, raiding the ranches for booty and cattle. Thus the soldiers of Fort Taos had their hands full.

The garrison was a strong one, but there were so many counter interests to guard, that officers, men and scouts were kept busy, and hence the band of outlaws known as El Cobras had steadily increased their number and were adding daily to their list of lawless deeds.

The fort proper was large, and was a combination of rock, adobe and stockade.

Its quarters were of the best, and as the summit of the hill was a natural park, it was a picturesque and delightful spot to dwell in.

Colonel Nelson Kane was the commandant, and he had been sent there as the right man in the right place, for he was a born soldier and knew just how to deal with the Indians and lawless element he would come in contact with, while he spoke Spanish well, and could understand well the Mexican people who were scattered about the country.

He had some five hundred soldiers under his com-

mand, an eight-gun light field battery, a battalion of infantry, and another of cavalry.

But, with this force he had not been able to more than keep the Comanches in check, and the outlaws had struck a number of severe blows upon the gold camps, the wagon trains and settlements.

To crush them, he felt that he must find their retreats, and run down their daring and skillful leader, and as his best scouts had failed to locate the strongholds of the outlaws, he had sent a request to the commandant of a Northwestern post for the loan of his chief of scouts, a man who had served under him in several campaigns, and whose worth he well knew.

That man was Buffalo Bill, and he had promptly volunteered for the work when Colonel Kane's brother officer had told him of the request, and the duty he would have to go upon at Fort Taos.

Of course Buffalo Bill knew that he would be going upon what to him was new territory, and among a strange people.

All had been told to him of what he was expected to do, and it at once became noised around that Buffalo Bill had been appointed a special scout at the fort, and was to serve as the chief of that most valuable band of men in buckskin, the right arm of the army.

After a day spent at the fort, where he found some friends among the officers and men, Buffalo Bill had gone out alone on a scout, as he said, "to get the lay of the land."

He had been gone a couple of days when one night all at the fort were shocked by learning that a sergeant of one of the troops had been killed.

The query went around as to who had done the dastardly deed, for the sergeant could utter no word to explain the matter.

Then it was that a thorough investigation was made to find the murderer.

One member of the troop the orderly sergeant belonged to was reported on the sick list.

So he was not called upon.

But the next morning the acting orderly sergeant of the troop reported that the horse of this same soldier, Otis, by name, was missing.

"Go to the hospital and ask Otis about his horse," ordered the captain.

The sergeant obeyed, to discover that though Private

Otis had reported sick at the hospital, he had not remained there. Further investigation proved that Private Otis had passed out of the fort the night Orderly Sergeant Eckford was shot, showing a pass signed by his captain to visit the scout's camp, and had not returned.

Thus suspicion at once fell upon Private Otis, as the one who had fired upon Sergeant Eckford.

The moment that Lieutenant Willis, acting captain of the troop to which Sergeant Eckford and Private Otis belonged, discovered that the latter had disappeared, he felt that he was the one who had fired upon the sergeant.

Going to the hospital, he learned just how Private Otis had reported and left there.

The officer who had passed Otis through the gate had said the pass he carried was signed by Lieutenant Willis.

The lieutenant had given no such pass, hence it was a forgery.

At once he reported his discoveries to Colonel Kane, and that officer said, in a decided tone:

"Otis did the deed and must be found.

"You can do nothing now, for it is dark, but have your junior officer and a score of men, with the best scout at the fort, ready to start at the first glimmer of day upon his trail, though it is unfortunate that by then he will have nearly thirty-six hours' start."

"Yes, sir; but I will go prepared to follow him any distance, for I will go myself, sir. I find that Otis prepared for his flight well, for he took his citizens' suit, blankets, provisions, and stole my repeating rifle, sir."

"He must be taken, Lieutenant Willis, dead or alive. I only wish Cody was here to go with you, for that man can trail a bird."

"I wish he was, sir. I will be in the saddle awaiting for dawn with my men," and the lieutenant returned to his quarters to prepare for his chase of the fugitive trooper, and when the sun rose, he was several miles away from the fort, following hot upon the trail of Otis, which the scouts had at once picked up and started upon.

It was about the middle of the forenoon when the scouts, who were ahead, were seen to halt upon a rise, and, dashing forward, Lieutenant Willis saw coming

toward them at full speed a riderless horse, without saddle or bridle.

"It is Chief Cody's horse, sir," said Bud Driver, a scout.

"Yes, sir," said Brazos Ben, the other scout.

"We will try and catch him," the lieutenant answered.

But there was no need of that, for the horse gave a loud neigh and ran right up to the side of the lieutenant's horse.

"Ah! Here is a note tied about his neck," and the lieutenant snatched it off and read aloud what Buffalo Bill had written.

"Ho, men! Buffalo Bill needs our aid. Secure his horse and come on, for moments are precious when life is at stake.

"Forward!" and the gallant officer dashed to the front, and away went the little band of rescuers at full speed.

It was full half-a-dozen miles to the ford, all knew, and Buffalo Bill's horse had to cover that distance before he had reached them, so that it would be over an hour after he had sent his dumb messenger for aid before he could get it.

The men all realized this, and wondered if they would arrive too late.

But they were following a leader who rode at a break-neck pace, and they were doing all in their power to reach the scene where Buffalo Bill was at bay.

The scouts told the officer that if he was near the ford as the short note stated, they knew of no good place there to stand off the redskins.

If he got under the protection of the bank, they said the Indians could cross at the ford and kill him from across the river, while the trees were too scattering to afford much protection.

But the scouts could not understand just how he had been able to send his horse away with that note and escape himself.

"We will find out when we get there.

"Now we must ride to the rescue," said Lieutenant Willis, and he urged his horse to a faster pace, though he was now in a rapid run.

CHAPTER XI.

AT BAY.

Every trooper was nerved to what was before him, that he might find at the end of his hard ride.

Buffalo Bill was a new man in their midst, but they had all heard of his many deeds of daring.

They wished to show him they were most willing to answer his appeal for help.

The lieutenant was close on to the heels of the scout's horse now, as they dashed along, still following the trail of the fugitive soldier, which was leading to the ford, all were glad to see.

Lieutenant Willis had in his mind an incident of two years before, when he and a small party of soldiers were surrounded by a large band of Sioux, and Buffalo Bill had put his life in his hands to slip out and go for aid.

He recalled that he had killed the guard over the Indian ponies, had selected the best animal he could in the darkness, and then had made a forty-mile ride to the ford, his horse dropping dead before he reached there, and the scout, then on foot, had run the mile intervening, and in half an hour was guiding a command back to the rescue.

Just when hope had been abandoned, and the brave soldiers were ready to die, Buffalo Bill had come in sight, and behind him a long line of troopers on horses that were staggering under the strain.

"He saved us then, and we must save him now," muttered the daring lieutenant, who had always been a warm friend of the King of the Border, as Buffalo Bill was known in the Northwest.

At last there came in sight a long line of heavy timber. Into the timber they dashed, then through the cut to the river, and they were forcing their horses across to the other side, still unseen by the redskins.

The last man was now across, and as the noise of splashing waters was no longer heard, there came to the ears of the troopers the yells of a hundred redskins, and the rattle of a score of firearms.

They were starting upon their last charge.

With several quick orders from Lieutenant Willis, rang out the bugle notes. The men rushed into the fight, their carbines began to rattle, and almost in the

very moment of victory the redskins had to face the despair of defeat.

They were startled by the suddenness of the shock, their warriors were falling under the well-aimed carbines of the cavalry, and with savage cries they were stampeded.

They would have rallied under shelter, but there was no shelter, and with two dozen men in sight, and the bugler seated on his horse at the ford, his face turned back over the trail, and the notes ringing lustily, as though calling more men into action, the Comanches sought safety in wild flight.

"I'll pursue, and then rally back here on this rise," called out Lieutenant Willis, and he turned quickly to the little rise in the timber on the river bank.

There he found the scout at bay.

Standing in the open grave was Buffalo Bill, coolly looking out over the scene where so lately had been a hundred of his foes.

He looked very stern, his eyes flashing, and there were red and black stains upon his face and hands.

The body of the dead Indian just across the foot of the grave, and those of the horses dragged close around it, looked like a pin cushion, for scores of arrows were sticking in them, while others were about in trees and in the ground.

"Holy smoke! Buffalo Bill, is that you or your ghost?" cried Lieutenant Willis, as he beheld the scout standing in the grave, as has been described.

"I can swear that I am alive, lieutenant, but if you had not arrived as you did, I would have been a dead man—I owe you my life, sir," and, springing out of the grave, Buffalo Bill extended his hand, which the lieutenant wrung, and said:

"The debt of my life is canceled, Bill, but let me see if you are badly hurt."

"All scratches, sir. I'm all right," was the smiling reply, and Buffalo Bill dragged the clinging arrows from his clothing just as the men came up and gave him a cheer.

In a few words he told his story, and how he had beaten off the redskins in their first attack, but felt that they would overwhelm him in their second charge, when suddenly the bugle notes had reached his ears.

But though the officer and men listened attentively to

the scout's words, their eyes rested upon the dead body of Private Otis, the fugitive soldier.

"It is a miracle, Cody, how you escaped death from all these arrows, and there are a number of rifle-shot marks about also, I see," said Lieutenant Willis.

"They were not aimed just right, sir," and his eyes just then falling upon the sparkling badge pinned upon his breast, he added, with a smile:

"And I guess there is some virtue in this also, sir."

"What is it, Cody?"

"A charm, sir."

"Nonsense! But it is a very elegant and remarkable ornament."

"Yes, sir; and it is claimed to be a charm, and I almost believe it is now. I will tell you about it, some time, sir, but I see you are anxious to know about this dead soldier whose body protected me so well.

"You were in pursuit of him, I take it, as my horse could not have gotten very many miles from here with my call for aid."

"We met him half-a-dozen miles back."

"And rode like a cyclone to get here. It was like you, sir."

"Yes, we rode rapidly, but we were not making slow time when we met your horse, for we were pursuing that soldier.

"You met him and he was killed here, I suppose?"

"Not here, sir," and Buffalo Bill told of his seeing the fugitive coming, the ambush of the chief and warrior, and that the dying soldier made a confession.

Of his camp and discovery by the Indians, the scout also told, and Lieutenant Willis asked:

"But who dug the grave?"

"I give it up, sir; but I guess it was dug for me, as I made use of it."

"It was dug by white men, and with spades, too."

"Yes, sir."

"And recently."

"Within the last forty-eight hours, sir, I should say."

"Well, we'll try and get at the bottom of the mystery, for we camp here a couple of hours for rest. Well, sergeant, what have you to report."

"The Indians continued their flight, sir, and the two scouts said they would follow them for a mile and then return.

"They had half-a-dozen killed and wounded to carry off with them, sir, and had lost a dozen ponies, as counted them."

"Some of Scout Cody's fine work, sergeant; but we camp here for a couple of hours, so look well to your horses and then have dinner.

"Now, Cody, I insist upon tying up those wounds you call scratches," and the lieutenant soon had the wounds dressed, and which were, indeed, slight.

That the band of Comanches were the braves of the chief who had ambushed the fugitive soldier, having become separated from them in some way, there was no doubt, and Lieutenant Willis gave orders to bury all the dead redskins in the open grave, but to carry the body of Otis back to the fort.

This was done, and Bud Driver and Brazos Ben soon after came into camp and reported that the Comanches were making all speed in their flight, evidently expecting a hot pursuit by a large force of troopers.

The two men were delighted at Buffalo Bill's escape and loud in their praise of the splendid stand he had made at bay.

The lieutenant and Buffalo Bill had their dinner together, and the officer was told the story of the fugitive soldier and his dying confession.

As Buffalo Bill thought it best to make a show of pursuing the redskins, and said that he felt sure other bands were upon the warpath, Lieutenant Willis decided that he would send one of the scouts back to the fort with all speed, asking for the rest of his troop to be sent and as many soldiers as the colonel deemed necessary while a couple of men would return at a slower pace with the body of Private Otis.

The scout was at once dispatched, with orders to hurry, the two men with the body of Otis set off at a slower pace, and the horses being well rested, Lieutenant Willis ordered "boots and saddles," sounded by the bugler, and the command left on the trail of the Indians. Buffalo Bill once more mounted upon his splendid horse that had served him so well.

There were half-a-dozen of the killed and wounded Indians whose ponies had run off uncaught, and they were quickly roped and brought in by Buffalo Bill, Brazos Ben, and taken along.

"I have let two soldiers and Driver go, Cody, but

"I have you, so that more than makes up for their price," said the lieutenant, as he rode ahead with Buffalo Bill on the trail of the Comanches.

CHAPTER XII.

AN APPEAL FOR AID.

"Sergeant, that man Cody has the instinct of a hound where danger is concerned. He is a wonder.

"When I was up in the Northwest, before I was ordered to my present troop, I was on staff duty with General Crook, and I saw the reports Cody would bring and they never failed. The man was born for this kind of work."

"said Lieutenant Willis, as Buffalo Bill and Brazos rode away, and he beckoned to the sergeant to approach, the latter replying with a respectful salute:

"Yes, sir, all the men say so, who know him. Mr. Cody is a remarkable man, sir, and his fight in that place proved it to those of us who did not know him except by name."

"Yes, and happy I am that we were just in time."

"It was your riding did it, sir; the men all say that."

"Now, any other scout would have pushed right on, feeling sure that the Comanches were running away with all speed; but Buffalo Bill has scented danger and I'll wager that he is right—that if we went on we would go into a trap."

"No doubt, sir."

"I will now move on slowly, sergeant, and without order," and the sergeant fell back into his place, and the band of troopers moved ahead at a walk, and the negro servant of the lieutenant, bringing up the rear.

"There was the Indian trail to follow, plain and fresh, it showed that the ponies had been kept at a run.

"Buffalo Bill, Buffalo Bill had scented danger, and it was best to go slow.

"The nature of the country Lieutenant Willis saw, was very best for ambush.

"The land was rolling, with high hills, canyons, cliffs, and the low valleys, all heavily timbered.

"The trail ran through the valleys and canyons, once it crossed the ridge, and one could not see over a couple of hundred yards ahead.

Thus many miles were gone over, and finally Lieutenant Willis halted and called the sergeant to him.

"I guess, after all, Buffalo Bill was mistaken, sergeant, and the redskins were too anxious to get away to make a halt and ambush pursuers.

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant, for it was military courtesy to agree with his commander.

"I will push on at a better gait than we have been going, for the scouts must be well ahead now, and——"

"There's Brazos Ben now, sir," and the servant pointed to the scout, who was coming rapidly toward them.

"No; it is Cody, and on the flank that Brazos Ben started on. He has made a complete circuit."

"Yes, sir, and rides as though he had news."

"Ho, Cody, how did you get to our left?" called out the lieutenant, as Buffalo Bill came up at a swift gallop.

"Flanked around, sir; but you must halt here, or in good position for a fight, for the Comanches are ambushed a little over a mile ahead and have been reinforced."

"By Jove! But you were right! I was just going on at a trot, getting tired of this snail's pace."

"It was well that you did not, sir, for you would not have suspected the ambush until you were fired on, and there are all of two hundred Indians there.

"I saw them from their rear, for I rode at a good pace, felt sure I passed them, and so obliqued to the left to cross their trail. I did not cross the trail of those we were following, and that showed that they had halted; but I did cross the trail of a band equal to the other in size, coming this way."

"Ah! Then we are in for it."

"Perhaps so, sir, though they move back, now they have a large force; but I think they'll stay there, hoping we will advance to-night or to-morrow."

"If reinforcements came, we would."

"Bud Driver has reached the fort, sir, by this, so that by midnight your troop should be here, and I hope there will be more, for we could catch those reds in a trap worse than they have set for us."

"I had better send a courier back to hurry reinforcements, and, if only my troop has been sent, to push on to the fort to request of Colonel Kane a reserve, for there may be still more Comanches on the warpath."

"I think there are, sir."

"Cody, I know just how you ride, and you can explain the situation fully to the colonel, so I wish you to go."

"I will, sir, for your scout, Brazos Ben, knows just what to do."

Within three minutes, Buffalo Bill, mounted upon his matchless horse, was away upon his mission of life and death.

Some hours later the sentinel at the fort reported that there was a horseman coming rapidly toward the fort, and soon after that it was Buffalo Bill.

The colonel waited in his quarters with his adjutant for the scout's arrival.

The colonel was puzzled, though he had not hesitated to send out the troopers in charge of Lieutenant Willis, an officer under thirty, but known as one of the best commanders in the army for his years.

He was full of dash, and though personally reckless, was most cautious of lives entrusted to him.

Full of ambition, he was the first volunteer for every deed of danger, and he had the name in the Northwest, where he had served for years, of being a clever Indian fighter.

But the coming of Buffalo Bill alone to the fort, so soon after the arrival of Scout Driver, for help, seemed to give an idea of trouble.

"Of course, Captain Irving, with Cody with the command, I felt that Willis would have a very able adviser, for I would not hesitate to place Buffalo Bill in command of several thousand men in the field, and I have known of campaigns where, had the commanding officers taken his modestly given advice, the result would have been far more successful, and redounded to their credit, instead of their having disaster to shoulder," said Colonel Kane.

"Yes, sir, Cody is a born soldier and an able commander, and as Willis has not got the big head, he would not only take his advice but ask it," answered Captain Irving.

"True, and I hope having this command did not swell his head, as you put it," returned the colonel, with a smile.

"I'll vouch that it did not, sir; for Willis, with all his dash and personal recklessness, is ambitious to win promotion, and mistakes do not gain that desired end.

"No, Colonel Kane, I am not at all worried; but

hark! the men are cheering Cody as he enters the fort, and going to the window, the two officers saw Buffalo Bill coming at the same rapid gallop up to headquarters.

His horse was in a foam, but did not appear broiled down, and as he sat upright in the saddle, Buffalo Bill carried his sombrero in his hand, answering the cheers that greeted him all along, with the waving of hands, chiefs from the ladies and the shouts of the children. Scout Driver had reported the desperate fight of the man, as he stood at bay in the open grave against fearful odds, and he had written himself down a hero with the name at Fort Taos, that kept up the name he had won elsewhere.

Throwing himself from his saddle, Buffalo Bill advanced toward headquarters, the sentinel, with a glance around, to see if he was observed, giving him a salute of "present arms," an honor the scout quickly acknowledged, while the colonel's orderly said:

"Walk right in, sir, for I announced your coming to the colonel."

"Ah, Cody, glad to see you back. Are you just finished the command?" and the voice of the colonel was moved while he grasped the hand of the scout and looked piercingly into his face to read there disaster or good news.

"Yes, sir, I left the command in what you may know as Ironsides Canyon, and I have the honor of being selected by Lieutenant Willis to bear to you a request for help."

Having heard the scout's report and the colonel having given orders for a troop to get the men ready, Colonel Kane said:

"Now, Cody, if you are not too tired, I will hear your report of your scouting expedition, for, from the looks of your left breast, you seem to have struck a gold and diamond mine." The colonel and likewise Captain Irving had their eyes fixed upon the badge which the scout wore.

"Yes, sir; I struck both; but pardon me if I do not take this off and show it to you, as it was pinned on by one who told me I was to wear it as a good luck charm."

"A charm?" And the colonel and adjutant examined it closely, the former remarking:

"I should think it would prove to the contrary, as a great value would tempt lawless men to kill you for the possession of it."

Buffalo Bill laughed and replied:

"You shall hear how I got it, sir, when I report the result of my scouting, and though I do not believe in superstitious happenings, Colonel Kane, it is a remarkable coincidence that I have had my life spared almost miraculously, I may say, since I have worn this charm."

"Your life appears to be a charmed one, anyhow, Cody, from all I have heard of you. But tell us about this charm, so we may judge if it has virtues, or whether our proverbial good luck has helped you."

In his low-toned, quiet manner, Buffalo Bill related the story of his strange adventures, ending with:

"Now, colonel, I wanted to return to the fort to get further posted about this country and its people. Of course, I have the map which you gave me, and the scouts advised me well in every particular, as far as the map of the land was concerned.

"Then, too, I have been able to find out much for my own benefit; but I was not aware that the El Cobras resided in a representation of snake skins. I did not know that they dared to roam at will in small bands about the country, and I had no idea that the ranches were as close as they are to the Indian country, and had such large herds of cattle.

"Then, too, I had not heard of this old hunter, Father Pete, and when I expected that the people of the ranches would be a hardy set, ignorant and rough, I met a lady in blue, splendidly mounted and equipped with a costly saddle, bridle and trappings, and beautiful and refined, while a gentleman rides half frozen into my camp, who says he is a ranchero, and a more courtly and handsome fellow it would be hard to find anywhere."

The colonel and adjutant had listened with intense interest to all the scout had to say, neither addressing a word to him to break the thread of the story.

Then the colonel said:

"We were most anxious about you during that blizzard, being fearful that having come from the northward you would not know what a norther was down here, or I was sorry I had not informed you what you might expect."

"I was prepared for it, sir, for I go ready for what may turn out."

"Now, to your most remarkable meeting with this mysterious woman."

"Yes, sir."

"She it was who gave you this badge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Dressed in blue, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it was the woman known as the Queen of Gold Canyon, Cody."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE QUEEN OF GOLD CANYON.

"Pardon me, sir; but who is the Queen of Gold Canyon?" asked Cody.

"Ah! you don't know?"

"No, sir."

"Then let me tell you that you had in your grasp, so to speak, a woman upon whose head a price is set."

"It hardly seems possible, sir."

"It is true, however."

"That would mean that she is a criminal."

"It is just what I mean, Cody."

"Can it be the one to whom I refer, sir?"

"Very beautiful, black hair and eyes fringed with long lashes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Teeth of pearl, as the poets say, and a rich, well-browned complexion."

"That is the description, sir."

"A superb form, and dressed in riding habit of blue, trimmed with silver braid?"

"Gold and silver braid, sir."

"Small hands, with gauntlet gloves covering them?"

"Just so, sir."

"A black horse, and a saddle and bridle ornamented with silver and embroidered, while she carried a revolver in a saddle holster, a gayly-covered serape rolled up under the cantel of her saddle, and another weapon in a belt about her waist?"

"That was the woman, sir."

"She was about twenty, say?"

"About that, sir."

"And spoke English with a slight accent?"

"Yes, sir."

"Captain, show Cody the printed description of this lady in blue."

The adjutant turned to a drawer, took out a paper, and handed it to Buffalo Bill, who slowly read it.

It was a complete description of the lady in blue, and she was spoken of as the Queen of Gold Canyon while there was a reward of five thousand dollars offered for her capture.

"But what has she been guilty of, sir?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"She is the fair decoy, the spy, of the El Cobras," replied the colonel, sternly.

"I only wish I had known it, sir, I'd have roped her in," was Cody's emphatic rejoinder.

"I only wish you had, and there I am at fault for not having posted you thoroughly.

"You know it now, however, and yet you may never cross her path again. Every one who does not know her as she is, is sure to meet her, but though time and again men have sought to gain that reward, they never see her.

"She had captured a dozen mule trains with ore, and has held up the coaches time and again, as also army and emigrant wagon trains, while she has pounced down upon the settlements and mining camps, at least her men, El Cobras have, and many believe that she is really the leader, for few can say they have ever seen the outlaw chief known as Captain Cobra, and it is thought she does the planning."

"A most dangerous woman, I should say, sir," Buffalo Bill responded.

"And one whose career should be brought to an end, for she can be very dangerous."

"She has been, if all reports are true. But what kind of a fellow was it who came back at night to kill you?"

Buffalo Bill described the outlaw.

"It might have been the chief, Captain Cobra."

"He did not strike me, sir, as the leader, except of that band I saw."

"Well, he is out of the way at least, and you deserve a great deal of credit, Cody, for your fight with him, and also for saving the woman from a most frightful death."

"And now, sir, may I ask what was the largest number you ever heard accredited to the band of outlaws?"

"As high as sixty—as low as fifteen; but in my opinion, two dozen would hit nearer the truth, and these are

divided into several bands, with a common retreat and one leader."

"Mostly Mexicans, I take it, sir?"

"Yes, with Americans, too, and I guess the world general is pretty well represented in its ranks."

"No one knows, sir, where the Queen of Gold Canyon has her retreat?"

"No; but I have hopes that you can find out."

"I will try, sir, and now I can return to my post, well posted about those I am to hunt down," turned Buffalo Bill.

"I have here some dispatches for Lieutenant Willis," said the colonel, "also letters for him and those of his command that arrived the night of their departure. First seek his camp and deliver them. Willis has never seen this lady in blue, as you call her, so have a conference with him upon the subject, and what advice he gives you will be good. If you need any of the scouts of his command, take them with you."

"I prefer to reconnoiter at first alone, sir."

"You are the best judge of that, but command me in all the aid you need."

Buffalo Bill left headquarters and went to his cabin to prepare for his departure.

When he had come to the fort from the Northwest he had brought with him two splendid horses, one almost as well known.

But this one he had decided to give a rest, and stay away from the fort upon the other animal.

If anything, he was a better animal than the one left behind, somewhat larger, certainly fleetier, and perfectly trained, for the scout never kept watch while he was scouting on this horse, and camped for the night in the most dangerous quarters.

Well prepared with blankets, camp equipage and supplies for a couple of weeks, Buffalo Bill left with full confidence that he would make some discovery on returning that would enable him to tell the colonel more than was yet known about the El Cobras.

He had dashed in ahead of the troop to report help was coming rapidly, and found the command had been in a hard fight with the Indians, who were in force and defiant.

The cheers of the men at help being near rang over the plains, and soon after the troop arrived, and decided to make a night attack.

The attack was made and proved a grand success, for the Indians were scattered in flight.

When again in camp, Buffalo Bill spoke to Lieutenant Willis about the Queen of Gold Canyon, and asked him about his having met her.

"Oh, yes; I have met her, Bill.

"I had gone to Santa Fe by coach, and was returning pretty well stocked with purchases I made there, and found that I had as a fellow passenger a very beautiful young girl.

"I told her of my purchases, and showed her a few of the trinkets I had bought; in fact, made a fool of myself to a perfect stranger, for the coach was held up by a band of El Cobras, and I showed fight, killing one of them in defense of the beautiful girl, when, as they could have dragged me from the coach and knifed me, she interfered, told me my punishment would be the loss of my purchases, and, mounting a horse they led up, she rode off at their head, taking with her the things I had bought in Santa Fe, all snugly stowed away on a pack horse the outlaws also had with them.

"I tell you, Cody, it almost upset my faith in woman-kind," and the lieutenant laughed.

Comparing notes, Buffalo Bill was assured that it was the same lady in blue he had met, and then he got considerable information from the lieutenant about the robbers, their plans of robbery and supposed haunts.

When the command pulled out of camp the next morning for the fort, Buffalo Bill rode away on the trail toward Ironsides Canyon.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEATH DEAL.

Buffalo Bill had set out to run down the outlaw band, and by so doing he would discover the Queen of Gold Canyon.

Armed with his maps, and the information given him by Colonel Kane, Lieutenant Willis and the scouts, he set out on his still hunt, fully equipped for the work.

He first made for the stage trail and met the coach just as he reached there.

The driver had a story to tell of how he had been held by Captain Cobra, and then told that he need dread the outlaw band no more, as El Cobras were to leave the hills.

"He then gave me this letter for Buffalo Bill," said Driver Casey.

The scout read the letter with a strange look upon his face.

Then he hastily wrote a few lines to be given to Colonel Kane, asked the driver a number of questions about the outlaws, and set off on their trail at a rapid pace.

Thus nearly a dozen miles were gone over, the canter being kept up, and the scout came to the bed of a large stream.

The other side, however, was a cliff, ranging in height as far as the eye could reach up and down, from sixty to three hundred feet.

Had it been an artificial wall built there, it could not have appeared more inaccessible, for a squirrel could not have scaled it.

Buffalo Bill was at a loss what to do, for the trail he followed led right into the water. When in a quandary as to which way to go, Buffalo Bill always allowed his horse to decide for him.

So he rode back a hundred yards, dropped the reins upon the saddle horn, and said:

"Now, pard, take your choice."

The horse went straight to the stream, waded in, and turned up the current.

"We go that way, pard," said Buffalo Bill, and, allowing the animal to drink, he rode up the stream, keeping in the shallow water to hide his trail in case he, too, should have a pursuer.

A mile was thus gone over, and had Buffalo Bill been riding along the bank instead of in the stream, he would not have seen what he did.

There was a clump of willows growing on a bar that had formed close under the cliff.

To the keen eye of the scout, the willows seemed to have been disturbed. He rode toward them, and as he got close he was sure that some animal had passed through them.

Was the outlaw retreat there? Buffalo Bill decided to find out before he ventured.

So he took from the pack horse a long hickory bow and a bundle of arrows, and, fitting one, he fired it into the willows.

This he repeated until half-a-dozen arrows had been sent into the thicket, but without results.

He did not wish to fire his revolver, for the reason

might betray his presence to some one. So he rode into the willows, revolver in hand.

He saw there the tracks of the horses which he had expected to find there.

The cliff was still as unscalable as before, and the scout was thrown completely off the scent. It was growing dark, and there was but one thing for him to do—go into camp. So he found a good place and camped for the night.

He passed the night without any interruption, and awoke refreshed and ready for work in the morning.

The horses had found a most luxuriant grazing ground, and when the scout awoke at dawn, and had his breakfast, they were ready for the day's work.

To try and find some way of scaling the cliff, Buffalo Bill rode up the stream for miles in one direction, and then turned and rode as far in another, without once having found a break in the wall that even a man could climb up, much less a horse.

He remembered then that he had heard of this same stream, with its plain on one side and wall-like bank on the other, running for nearly a day's journey.

Nearer the cliff there were scrub oaks, cedars and an occasional pine. In one thicket, not twenty feet from the cliff, and densely thick, was the trunk of a large oak.

What attracted the scout's attention to that old trunk, Buffalo Bill did not understand at first.

He began to study it more and more, and said, after a while:

"It could not have rotted away in very many years; there is no sign of its having been cut up, and I am just suspicious enough, owing to Captain Cobra's mysterious disappearance just here, to know if the trunk is just what it appears to be."

With this the scout stepped toward the thicket and found that he could make his way through without difficulty, the branches coming readily back into place again.

Reaching the trunk, he saw that it was apparently all right; but he gave it a kick and there was a hollow sound.

Walking around it, he suddenly stopped upon the cliff side, and gave a low whistle. What had caught his observant eye was a line across the tree, like a track of a saw.

It was about five feet and a half from the ground and three feet long.

Then he saw a line like the one that had caught his eye, running up the tree for the distance of three feet.

To find a broken limb projecting about three inches out from the tree was easy work, and pulling it open, Buffalo Bill had the satisfaction of finding that the sawed lines marked out a door in the tree.

When open, the scout saw that it was hung on hinges from within, and that the whole tree was hollowed out most ingeniously.

Buffalo Bill was delighted with his discovery, and he gazed at the ingenious entrance to some underground retreat with a great deal of interest.

From without the trunk appeared to grow up out of the ground, for earth and grass were about its roots.

It was in the very midst of a dense thicket, some forty feet in size, but which no eye could penetrate without search.

Getting his arms ready for use, Buffalo Bill drew the door shut after him, and saw that it was a perfect fit and the height of a tall man from the ground.

The interior of the cavern showed that it was a regular rendezvous, for there were rolls of serapes, several saddles, bridles, lassoes, and a number of weapons.

Pine straw was along one side, doubtless for bedding and close to the window-like opening that looked out of the cliff, there were rocks piled up, forming a chimney. Cooking utensils, a lot of provisions, and a leg of venison recently killed were there.

"Not a bad retreat, by any means.

"And used as a hiding-place in time of need."

Buffalo Bill returned to his camp for dinner, and took with him to the retreat something for his supper.

He staked the two horses out, after having led them to water, and returned to the retreat to find that no one had been there in the couple of hours that he was away.

He did not know that any one would come, but he was going to lie in wait and see.

In another thicket near, where he could command a view of the hollow tree, he spread his blanket and lay down to watch.

Thus several hours passed away, and night came on but no one appeared.

Eating his supper in darkness and silence, the scout laid down to sleep, conscious that the tread of a horse would awaken him.

The night passed, however, and no one came, but just as he was about to go to his camp for breakfast, he heard the sound of approaching hoofs.

Instantly he was on the alert, his rifle ready, and soon in the early dawn he saw a horseman approaching at a canter.

The man halted near the cliff, hitched his horse to the tree and disappeared in the little thicket that covered the descent to the cavern.

As the horse was hitched by the rein, and not staked out nor unsaddled, Buffalo Bill felt certain that the man's stay would be brief.

It was not yet light enough for him to get a good view

of the horseman, but he quickly decided upon his plan of action.

Rising from his blankets, he made his way over to where the horse was.

Fortunately, there was a large tree near—in fact, it was to a limb of this tree the animal was tied, and Buffalo Bill took his stand behind the trunk.

Day soon dawned, and he saw that the horse was a good one, and the saddle and bridle were of the Mexican pattern, while a serape was rolled up behind the cantel, and a rifle hung to the horn, along with the canteen and provision bag.

Buffalo Bill showed no impatience, simply waited with the same calm manner an Indian would have done who took no heed of time.

As there came distinctly to the scout's nostrils the smell of smoke, Buffalo Bill glanced toward the cliff and saw that smoke was rising over the edge.

"Ah! Cooking his breakfast, is he? I'll join him, though I have not been invited."

Then the scout walked over to the tree, opened the secret door, took out the short ladder, mounted it and stepped within.

The door was closed behind him, and the odor of broiling bacon and venison steak came to him, along with the appetizing fumes of coffee.

Knowing that the man must be busy with his cooking, forty feet away, Buffalo Bill decided to go in at once.

Through the dark archway he beheld his man standing in the broad glare of the daylight streaming into the cavern entrance in the cliff.

The breakfast was bountiful for one man, and about ready.

The man he saw was a Mexican, with a face by no means prepossessing. His belt of arms lay near him, and he had thrown aside his sombrero also. Just as he turned and took his breakfast off the fire, Buffalo Bill slid out of the arched way to within ten feet of him, halting just where the man had laid down his belt of arms and sombrero.

"I'll breakfast with you, pard," said Buffalo Bill, quietly, and a revolver covered the Mexican as he spoke.

There was a yell of terror, a bitter Mexican oath, and the man dropped upon his knees as he beheld the tall form of Buffalo Bill and the weapon covering him.

"Oh, señor!" was all he could say.

"Hands up, there!"

Up they went.

Taking up one of the many lariats lying around, Buffalo Bill threw a noose over the man's head, and then quickly passed the coils several times around his legs, until he felt he was secure.

Then he felt about him to be sure he had no concealed weapon, and remarked:

"Now, pard, we'll have breakfast, for there is enough for two."

"Me no care to eat," growled the Mexican.

"Ah! Lost your appetite, have you? Well, I haven't, and I advise you to eat also, for you have a long journey before you."

"Where go?"

"To the fort."

"What for?"

"To hang, I guess."

"Me good man—me no do bad."

"Who are you?"

"Poor Mexican man. Me cowboy on ranch."

"What are you doing here?"

"My friend Antonio live here."

"He is like you, then, an outlaw?"

"Oh, no; me good man."

"This is a den of Captain Cobra's, for there are masks and other things enough here to prove it. Eat your breakfast, and come with me."

"How you come here?"

"Just as you did," and Buffalo Bill began to eat his breakfast.

The Mexican had only a cup of coffee, and that nearly choked him, for he was quivering with fear.

Breakfast over, the scout bound his prisoner's hands and made him go ahead of him.

Reaching camp, Buffalo Bill staked out the horse, and then said:

"It will be several hours before the coach comes along, and I wish to find out just what you know."

"Me poor man. Me don't know much."

"Well, I have seen very poor men know enough to teach very rich ones. I expect from you good, common sense, enough to keep your head out of the hangman's noose. If you wish me to say the same thing in Spanish I will do so."

"Me understand."

"Good! With that we can talk business."

"You business man?"

"Yes, just now, for I am buying information—have you got any to sell?"

"How much you give?"

"Pard Mexican, your head is very level, and we begin to understand each other, I see. I am hot on the trail of El Cobras, and you are one of the gang——"

"No, no, señor! Me good man."

"See here, I am no missionary trying to save your soul, but your neck. You are an outlaw, and as one of the gang you know what I wish to know. You have information I wish to buy, and that is the situation."

"Me not a Cobra."

"You know where their retreat is, you have a mask to wear when needed, and under your leggins and woolen shirt you have their dress, while your snake band to your hat is sticking out of your pocket. Don't trifle with me or I'll hang you myself."

"What your name?"

"Pardon me for not introducing myself sooner, for I really should not have been so rude. Some call me Buffalo Bill."

The man started, his face turned very pale, and his lips quivered as he looked piteously at the scout, and said:

"You Booffalo Beell, senior?"

"Yes, pronounced in a more American style."

"You wear charm?"

"Ah! you know that, do you?" and the scout was interested.

"Yes—there!"

The man pointed to the charm on the breast of the scout.

"Another proof that you are an outlaw, if I need another. But come, let us strike a bargain."

"Me understand, senior," and the manner and look of the Mexican were more respectful now, since the scout had given his name.

"Now, I offer you your life for the information you can give me about Captain Cobra; how many men he has, where the Queen of Gold Canyon can be found, and all else that I wish to know."

"They will kill me, senior."

"Who?"

"The Cobras."

"Well, you appear to be between the devil and the deep sea, for I will kill you if you don't tell."

"Me poor Mexican man. Me know heap, for me am Cobra meself, me am. Me got leettle life, but without money it worth very little."

"If senior want to know what me know, take me to Herders' Ranch, where Cobra don't see me, don't know, and me tell heap much. He will give me my leettle life, two horse, fine saddle, brid'le, good serape and clothing, get all at ranch, and one thousand pesos, and let me go away to States—not to Mexico, for Cobras kill me there. What senior say to me?"

Buffalo Bill had expected a larger demand, and, feeling that he could promise the money, out of what would come from the outlaws' booty when taken, or at least take it from the reward on the head of Captain Cobra, and each one of his band, he replied:

"I will accept your terms upon one condition."

"Yes, senior."

"I will send you through to the ranch in Lem Luby's coach, and he will put a bullet through your heart if you play any monkey business with him."

"When I have found that you are to be trusted, I will come to Herders' Ranch and fulfill my part of our contract."

"Me tell senior all," was the low reply; "me don't want die; me want live."

It was Buffalo Bill's Death Deal—the life of the traitor outlaw for the lives of Captain Cobra and his comrades.

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN COBRA AND THE GOLD QUEEN.

The note the scout had sent by Casey, the stage driver, had asked Colonel Kane to send to him at once, Lieutenant Willis, thirty cavalymen and two scouts.

They were to follow the coach on the back trail and come prepared to fight, or for a long march. There was now nothing for Buffalo Bill to do but to remain in hiding to await their coming.

When the coach came along, Buffalo Bill stood in the trail to meet it.

His Mexican prisoner was with him.

"The soldiers are comin', pard Cody; just out of sight behind me," said Casey.

"Good! And here is a prisoner for you to take through to Herders' Ranch, and he must be kept there for me."

"He'll be there when you wants him," and the prisoner, securely bound, was placed in the coach, which drove on.

Soon after Lieutenant Willis and his men came up, thirty-three in number.

"We are here, Cody. What is the game?" said the officer, quietly.

"Captain Cobra and his band."

"I knew you'd do it. Lead the way."

The scout did lead the way to his camp and there the horses were left under guard, and on foot the men were taken to the secret retreat in the cliff as soon as night came on.

It was a surprise to the soldiers, a greater one to the outlaws, thirteen in number, who were there packing up their booty preparatory to leaving, as Captain Cobra had told Driver Casey it was his intention to do.

The cliff cavern was their booty storehouse, and Captain Cobra had left all there to divide.

But Captain Cobra was not there.

Thirteen of his men were, however, and they were thunderstruck at seeing Buffalo Bill and the soldiers enter the cavern, which was lighted up by fires.

In answer to the stern command to surrender, one outlaw fired a shot and a soldier dropped dead.

It was a signal for Buffalo Bill's Death Deal, for within a moment of time shots were fired by the score and not an outlaw was left alive.

"Leave the sergeant in charge here, sir, while you and a dozen men come with me, for we wish Captain Cobra now, Lieutenant Willis, and—the Queen of Gold Canyon."

"Do you know where to find them, Bill?"

"Yes, sir; for my prisoner told me the truth—he saved his life and earned the blood money I promised him."

On through the night Buffalo Bill led the way, Lieutenant Willis by his side and a dozen cavalymen following.

They passed the settlement known as Herders' Ranch before it was dawn, and just as the east grew crimson with the rising sun, halted at the ranch of Tom Travis.

He welcomed the scout and lieutenant cordially, as he came out of his cabin to where they stood.

"Come in to breakfast, gentlemen—I am glad to meet you again, Mr. Cody."

"And I to find you at home, Mr. Travis—you are my prisoner."

The man started back, but a pair of revolvers and a dozen carbines covered him.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"That I know you as Captain Cobra, the outlaw, as well as Travis, the rancher. Don't force me to shoot you, Travis, for I will if you raise a finger, as I know all. Where is your wife?"

"My wife?"

"Yes, for your hand is wiped out, your retreat is known, you are a prisoner, and I now wish to find the Queen of Gold Canyon—your wife, whose love for you made her an outlaw, and who followed your evil life into this wild land."

"Her crime only has been in aiding me to get gold, hoping I would the sooner give up this evil life. I allow I am guilty. I gave to Driver Casey a letter for you, and in it I told you that Captain Cobra and his men would leave the trails."

"I told you that your coming here had driven me to do so, for you had saved her life and mine, and I would not war against you. I had intended to seek your death, and, as a warning of your doom, I had a grave dug for you at the ford and intended placing a headboard there, with a warning on it for you to see."

"The coming up of the norther drove me to seek shelter, and while my men went to a retreat, I tried to reach my home."

"You saved me that night,

"You have won; but I will never hang, for I have vowed to die by my own hand first."

Quick as a flash, he raised his hand, and a small Derringer pistol snatched from his breast pocket sent a bullet into his heart.

"After all, he was a manly fellow, though an outlaw," said Buffalo Bill.

Search was made for the Gold Queen, but in vain, for only the servants were at the ranch, and they were known not to have been aware of the evil secret life their master led.

Buffalo Bill had really felt deep sympathy for the woman after their Mexican prisoner had told him her sad story and was glad of her escape, as was also Lieutenant Willis.

The scout's triumph had been complete when he had wiped out the band, and upon his return to the fort, the greatest praise was given him, for his splendid work, which had indeed been a deal of death to El Cobras.

Two days after the traitor outlaw had received his reward and been set free to go his way at will. After the return of the scout, with Lieutenant Willis and his men, to Fort Taos, all loaded down with booty, a letter had arrived for Buffalo Bill, dated at a frontier town.

It was written in a feminine hand and read:

"He told the truth, for we had planned to return to Mexico, as we could not raise a hand against you, after owing you our lives.

"I was at the ranch and saw my husband die by his own hand; but, disguised as a Mexican boy, you did not recognize me, and thus I escaped.

"I shall return to my home and my people in Mexico, where United States laws will not reach me, and perhaps I can atone for the evil past by deeds of good. As a souvenir of an unhappy woman, keep the charm I gave you.

"Good-by, and may you know success through life is the farewell wish of
THE GOLD QUEEN."

This letter Buffalo Bill read to Colonel Kane and Lieutenant Willis, for it told the story of how well his work had ended there, for he had won the game by his Death Deal.

The charm he still has and prizes.

THE END.

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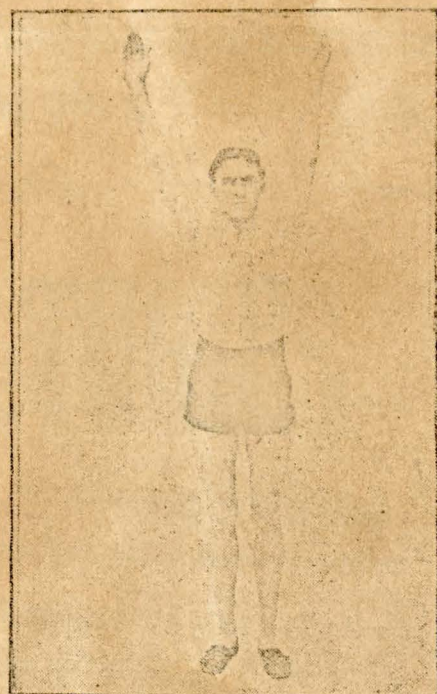
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